On the 26th of June, 1777, on the plains below the Watchung Mountains, Gen. Washington's Continental Forces of under 6,000 men fought a running battle with combined British and Hessian Troops numbering nearly 12,000. Early on that hot Thursday morning, the British, under the command of Gen. William Howe, feigned a departure from New Jersey to draw the colonial forces from the safety of their mountain refuge. But late that night they turned and began to march upon the "rebel" troops, who left their mountain camps to come to the low country at Samp Town (South Plainfield), Quibble Town (Piscataway – North Plainfield) and outposts in the Short Hills and Ash Swamp (Scotch Plains) to watch what they thought was a British retreat.

Howe would later write: "The right, under command of Lord Cornwallis, with Major General Grant, Brigadiers Mathew and Leslie and Colonel Dunlop, took the route by Woodbridge towards Scotch Plains. The left, where I was with Major Generals Stirn, Vaughan and Grey, Brigadiers Cleveland and Agnew, marched by Metuchen Meetinghouse to join the rear of the right column in the road from thence to Scotch Plains."

Shortly before sunrise, scouts of Col. Daniel Morgan's riflemen encountered Cornwallis in Woodbridge (Green St./Rt. #1) and shots alerted Washington of the enemy's surprise approach. Discerning the British intent to secure the mountain passes, Washington began with haste to remove the main forces at Quibble Town and ordered the divisions of Maj. Gens. Nathaniel Greene, Benjamin Lincoln, Adam Stephen and John Sullivan back to the heights. The delaying tactics of the riflemen gave the American troops and local militia time to return to the safety of the Watchungs.